



**DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
NEW ORLEANS DISTRICT, CORPS OF ENGINEERS
P. O. BOX 60267
NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA 70160-0267**

REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF

April 23, 2002

Public Affairs

Mike Slaughter
Executive Editor
The Courier
P.O. Box 2717
Houma, La. 70361

Dear Mr. Slaughter,

The environmental critics of the Morganza to the Gulf Hurricane Protection Project should consider more points than were expressed in recent articles in The Courier. Contrary to their assertions, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has met its obligations of environmental stewardship for this project.

The feasibility study report makes it clear that the Morganza project would benefit the coastal ecosystem in the areas around Houma. This conclusion is supported by the data laid out in the report and supporting appendices.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service also backed this conclusion in its final Coordination Act Report submitted this month.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers coordinated with a multi-agency team in the study phase. In addition to the Corps, it included the Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Marine Fisheries Service, U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Louisiana's Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, Department of Natural Resources and Terrebonne Levee and Conservation District.

Because of this team, the Morganza project's design was adapted to meet the goals of coastal restoration. Examples are the many environmental water-control structures in addition to the floodgates on Bayou Grand Caillou and Grand Bayou.

Throughout the study, the interagency team evaluated project impacts and the choices available to mitigate for them. The team used the Wetland Value Assessment model that has been used for 10 years to evaluate coastal projects. This model also is used by the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources to achieve coastal consistency.

Results of the wetland assessment model and the supporting documents may be found in Appendix C of the Morganza feasibility report.

The interagency team will continue to play significant roles in this project, first in the detailed design and subsequently in the operation of water-control structures. They have been joined by

the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, which now has a local representative. EPA had not participated earlier because of travel expenses from Dallas to Houma.

All of the agencies on the team are also represented in the development of the Coast 2050 coastal-restoration project, so continuity between the projects is assured.

Concerns were raised about drainage that would be intercepted by the Morganza project's levees. The Corps will evaluate these concerns during detailed design of the Morganza project. The Corps of Engineers consistently provides for the drainage of intercepted water, in Louisiana and elsewhere. And the Corps will take all the steps necessary to provide for intercepted drainage in the Morganza project.

There was also an inaccurate procedural objection raised by an environmental organization that the Corps of Engineers was not in compliance with its agreement with the EPA regarding permits. It should be noted that the Corps-EPA agreement does not require permits for the Corps' civil works projects, such as the Morganza project. This is explained on a Corps site on the Web http://www.usace.army.mil/inet/functions/cw/hot_topics/me/faq.htm.

Sincerely,

James D. Addison
Chief, Public Affairs